

# **Enjoying being a married missionary!**

## **Marriage on the mission field – part 3**

### **Solving Conflicts in Marriage**

#### **Introduction:**

- Fundamental topic for discussion – living & serving cross-culturally create new stresses upon your marriage relationship and increase the possibility for tension and conflicts occurring
- What lessons have you already learned through facing conflicts in marriage? Each one give one major lesson
- What do we mean with “conflicts”? Is there a fundamental difference between ordinary disagreements over everyday issues and extraordinary, painful conflicts over principle issues? Examples?
- Wrong and right ways of facing / handling conflict in marriage: Flight (escape, avoid, deny: “what conflict?? I don’t have a problem – you do!”) and fight (go at the obstacle head-on, trying to knock it down or out of the way by brute force / human pressures, eg force of personality, intimidation, manipulation); cf. God’s way is to look behind or below the conflict and treat the root causes, not just focus on the outward symptoms

#### **Biblical imperatives:**

- Don’t just let conflicts go hoping that somehow the problem will just solve itself or go away (“flight” – denying them, cf. “We can’t be seen to have any disagreements or conflicts – we must be seen to be spiritual”) – see Eph.4:26 “Don’t let the sun go down on your wrath”
- Be a peace-maker – working hard to live in peace with your mate rather than enjoying to stir up trouble and a conflict – see Rom.12:16-18; Heb.12:14; James 3:17-18
- Accept your partner in the Lord as He has made him/her, also accept both their strengths and their weaknesses – see Rom.15:7 – but also be willing to change in order to remove the source of the “rubbing” or aggravation that sets the stage for many conflicts/tensions
- Listen to one another (see Prov.8:32-34) – be wise and accept correction from one another – see Prov.12:1; 15:5,32 – cf. living on with the attitude on a particular issue “I’m right and he/she is wrong” or “He/she is the one who must change”
- Confess your sins to one another, forgiving one another – conflicts are often caused by sinful attitudes, words and actions (eg lack of trust or consideration) – the path to healing and reconciliation is through confessing sin and asking/giving forgiveness – see Luke 17:3-4; James 5:16 – “I was wrong. Forgive me” are among the most powerful words in human relationships leading to harmony and happiness

#### **Wise counsel:**

- Establish some simple ground rules for “conflict resolution sessions”: Each one is given the opportunity to speak without interruption; ask questions for clarification; avoid emotive words such as “every” and “never”; blaming or accusing is never helpful; ask “what” questions for clarification rather than “why” questions

- Examine your heart attitudes, eg conflicts over issues where wife or husband respond as his/her parents do – problem is related to a lack of acceptance and love for parents-in-law – guard against using dangerous, negative, critical words and phrases, eg “you are just like your mother / father”
- Avoid casting blame (eg “You ....”; “you made me do it!”) – making accusations inevitably leads to unhelpful defensive responses – and when this happens repeatedly, the defensive response becomes deeply-rooted
- Recognise When there is a conflict between husband and wife, generally both sides were in the wrong in some way – not helpful when we think that “I’m totally in the right in this particular issue” – what about sinful attitudes? neglect?
- Recognise that there are always two sides in every conflict situation – look within examining your heart (eg wrong attitudes) and your actions (eg neglect, failure to love), then humbly confess your part in causing the conflict – a humble attitude quickly solves most conflicts in marriage and other relationships – Prov.22:4
- Learn to recognise your own and your spouse’s “red flag issues” – ie those matters that we get too stirred up with each time the issue is raised, eg spending money on certain things; tidiness; appearance/dress – your examples?
- Learn to recognise and give room for differences in approach to solving problems – waiting and thinking versus “must solve it now!” – those who process their struggles out loud versus those who need to process their thoughts and feelings within and then share them
- Give time to work through the more complex issues and differences – helpful in some conflicts to have a “cooling off” period to get free from some of the unhelpful emotional stuff/baggage
- Don’t solve difficult major conflicts in front of your children (this does not imply that it is wrong for children to see their parents disagreeing with each another)
- Treat minor conflicts as minor, but face major conflicts and tensions seriously
- Train your ear to listen to both words and feelings (verbal & non-verbal communication) – eg when they are angry with you, what is the real message they are trying to communicate to you?

### **Deeper issues:**

- Recognise that we all bring with us into our marriage a certain mindset regarding conflicts (good or bad or normal?) – influenced by experiences in formative years, eg parents who were forever fighting and arguing – “conflicts” may be associated pain and sadness, even fear (eg hurting one another, break-up of parents’ marriage etc.) – such folk will have a natural tendency to run from and avoid conflict in marriage and in other relationships at any cost (sometimes using Scripture to justify their flight from dealing with conflict situations) – such people will need help and encouragement to view conflicts as normal but also their partner will need to understand the deep emotional pain whenever a conflict arises
- Work to find root causes of conflict rather than just talking about or treating symptoms, eg conflicts over spending/finance – possible root issues? selfishness, compulsiveness, need to plan together / work on a family budget etc.
- Be aware of the connection between conflicts and our differences: differences between male & female, differing values and belief systems rooted in different family values and priorities – also differences in our spiritual and emotional maturity (immature and wanting to control vs. mature and settled / not easily

threatened) – all of us are on a learning curve and need to give our mates much grace rather than condemning

Graham Roberts

March 6, 2002